

## Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria



### Priorities for State Budget 2008/09

Population ageing represents one of the greatest achievements of the twentieth century, resulting from improvements in public health and economic development. The challenge for governments is to understand and realise the opportunities this change in demographics presents, through social and economic policy, and with a whole of government approach.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has proposed a concept of 'Active Ageing' to guide policy makers. The 'Active Ageing' concept is not confined to issues of older age, as it provides a framework that encompasses the life course and recognises the diversity of individuals regardless of age.

***If ageing is to be a positive experience (for individuals and societies) longer life must be accompanied by continuing opportunities for health, participation and security.***

Active Ageing: A Policy Framework

WHO, 2002

COTA Victoria acknowledges the achievements of the State Government under *A Fairer Victoria*, and its on-going initiatives in Transport, the support of Positive Ageing Strategies and commitment to Social Housing.

With the significant population growth in the number of seniors in the coming decades, COTA Victoria calls on the State Government to continue to address the long-term needs of older people in this State, particularly in the areas of

- **Public and Community Transport** – by setting benchmarks for minimum service frequency for all public transport options and providing subsidies for a range of innovative demand responsive services that are integrated with local community venues and mass transport systems.
- **Housing** – by establishing an Office for Seniors Housing, and ensuring that affordable housing is provided to vulnerable older people.
- **Public Health and Aged Care Services** – by ensuring at least 6.5% per annum growth in Home and Community Care, and by further reducing the waiting lists for access to general dental care and dentures by increasing the funding formula rates by 18%.

As the peak body representing older people in Victoria, Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria, engages with over 60,000 senior Victorians annually. As a result of our work with older people and on the issues that impact on them and their quality of life, COTA Victoria calls on the State Government to address the following issues as a matter of priority in the 2008/09 Budget allocations.

I look forward to discussing these priorities with you in more detail.

Sue Hendy  
Executive Director

## **Positive Ageing Strategy**

COTA Victoria welcomes the announcement by the Minister for Ageing of the development of a Positive Ageing Framework.

We also endorse the State Government's commitment to reducing inequalities in health and its underpinning issue of social disadvantage. The World Health Organisation's 'active ageing' approach aims to ensure the optimisation of opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.

COTA Victoria calls on the Government to

- demonstrate its commitment to the issues of the ageing population with adequate funding to implement a whole of government Ageing Framework.

## **Older Men's Health**

No policy unit exists for men's health; nor have specific health policies been developed in relation to men. In contrast a national health policy for women has been established since 1989.

COTA recognizes that the health and wellbeing of older men can be positively affected through involvement in social groups and supports their healthy ageing through men's discussion groups.

COTA calls for the State Government to:

- Establish a unit within the Victorian government, with a dedicated budget and responsibility for developing a clear public policy direction for men's health.
- Fund COTA for the employment of an Older Men's Health Coordinator to bolster older men's social inclusion under a policy framework emphasising community development, more than expansion of infrastructure, and to expand and resource the network of OM:NI (Older Men:New Ideas) Groups across Victoria.

## **Additional Support for those on Low Incomes**

We are concerned about the impact of rapidly rising costs of housing and basic necessities of life on people on low incomes. Income security and the confidence that comes from a decent standard of living are essential for healthy and active ageing.

COTA Victoria calls on the State Government to:

- Allocate sufficient funds to ensure that the costs of utilities, rates and taxes are affordable for those on low incomes.

## **Protecting the Financial Assets of Seniors**

The findings of COTA Victoria's *Credit Preferences and Credit Traps for Older People* project confirmed the need for concern about the rapid rise in the number of home equity release products now available, the heavy advertising of these products, and the potential vulnerability of many older people who have limited income opportunities to meet their needs.

COTA is particularly concerned about the lack of regulation of mortgage brokers, and the availability of independent and accessible information for older people to assist them to make decisions about the financial options.

COTA Victoria calls on the State Government to:

- allocate funds to assist older people to achieve better understanding of the financial options available to them in their retirement.
- introduce the regulation of mortgage brokers and providers of home equity release products to better protect people who may be vulnerable in this market.

## **Provision of Transport for Health**

Lack of accessible transport means that some older people do not seek assistance early and may not attend health services for preventative or rehabilitative care.

The resultant cost of ambulance transport and treatment in an acute care facility is significantly more costly than investment in accessible transport for health care earlier in the health episode.

Innovative approaches to transport are possible through the better coordination of the total transport infrastructure including aspects of Repatriation Transport Scheme, local government initiatives and

HACC transport and brokerage arrangements for transport services that give older people door-to-door service.

COTA Victoria calls on the State Government to:

- encourage all other jurisdictions to agree that Australian Health Care Agreements 2008 (AHCA) include requirements and funding for transport to health care services for older people.
- Ensure the AHCA provide for flexible models that are appropriate for the particular needs of local communities, existing transport networks, geographical distribution and demographic structures. All models should meet agreed criteria to ensure equitable and appropriate services.

## **Empowering Seniors**

### **1. Information for Seniors**

COTA Victoria's Seniors Information Victoria (SIV) is a vital service for older Victorians, providing detailed information on issues covering all aspects of seniors' lives including financial, social & community support, health & wellbeing, and housing options.

Over the past five years contacts with Seniors Information Victoria has increased threefold - in 2001/2002 SIV recorded over 7,000 contacts; in 2005/2006 over 17,000 contacts were recorded, and in the last year (06/07) there were over 23,000 contacts with the service. In the same period there has been minimal increase in funding support from the Victorian government necessitating the reduction in hours of the service.

COTA Victoria calls on the State Government to

- Allocate appropriate levels of funding to Seniors Information Victoria to enable this service to better meet the information needs of senior Victorians now, and to meet growing demand.

### **2. Seniors Education Programs**

Community education is a central component of COTA Victoria's strategy to inform older people on a range of issues, change attitudes and promote positive ageing. A Peer Education approach is utilised in many of COTA Victoria's information and education programs for seniors. It was chosen due to its effectiveness as an education and information sharing mechanism, as senior's valuable life experiences enable them to identify, empathise and be able to pass on important messages to their peers within the seniors' community.

Through its Peer Education programs COTA delivers approximately 450 sessions a year, reaching almost 9,000 people, on a range of issues. In addition, under this program COTA Victoria provides one-on-one computer training sessions which has been provided to over 400 individuals in the past 12 months.

COTA Victoria calls on the State Government to:

- provide funding to COTA to ensure the on-going viability and development of its Community Education Unit as a core activity of COTA Victoria, and the employment of an Education Coordinator to oversee the delivery of education programs on a range of issues to seniors across the state.

### **3. Engaging Consumers**

Effectively engaging seniors in planning and decision-making processes can increase access and result in better policies, planning and service development for Victorian citizens. In line with community capacity building central to 'A Fairer Victoria', consumer engagement should be a State Government priority.

COTA Victoria has an important and long-standing role representing the views of older Victorians. This function of our organisation provides valuable service and supports the State Government to shape and implement its policies in the community. It is therefore essential that the State Government provide adequate support to build community capacity by adequately funding community-based organisations, which constitute the active mechanisms of civil society.

COTA Victoria calls on the State Government to:

- Ensure adequate funding to implement consumer engagement strategies across all State government program streams, not just aged services and HACC, as seniors are consumers of the full range of governmental policies and services.
- Provide adequate resources to develop models of consumer engagement that are State-wide in scope.
- Increase funding to COTA Victoria to expand the development and implementation of a State-wide seniors' consumer engagement model.
- Provide adequate and ongoing funding to COTA Victoria to enhance its capacity to engage with older people, to represent the views of seniors in processes of government and community, and to implement COTA's mission to mobilise seniors to help shape a just society.

## **Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria**

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria's mission is to mobilise older people and those who work with them, to age well in a just society.

It is committed to human rights, social justice and the eradication of ageism.

COTA Victoria is a non-profit organization, of individual older people and organizations representing older people, committed to improving the well-being of all older Victorians.

### **COTA Victoria's role**

- Provides information and services to older people, their relatives and the wider community
- Provides policy advice on behalf of older people to state and local governments, service providers and the general community
- Undertakes research and policy development on issues affecting older people
- Promotes and publicizes the needs and preferences of older people to the general community
- Encourages a high level of involvement of older people in the organisation and its activities.

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